



VIRGINIA CATHOLIC BISHOPS URGE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO IMMIGRATION-REFORM LEGISLATION

Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo have called upon U.S. Senators John Warner and George Allen to work for comprehensive immigration-reform legislation, and to reject "the enforcement-only approach taken by the House of Representatives."

In letters to the two Virginia senators dated March 17, the Commonwealth's two Catholic bishops stated, "We wish to underscore that our Church affirms the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, especially at a time when security is of particular concern. In our view, however, our nation's immigration crisis can only be addressed effectively by a comprehensive approach." In criticizing H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005 passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in December, the bishops observed that the measure "reaches well beyond the issue of national security – so far beyond it, in fact, that it would even punish church workers for the 'crime' of feeding and sheltering people instead of screening their immigration status."

The bishops urged Senators Warner and Allen to support "elements of genuine immigration reform – the type of reform that would protect our national security, respect our common humanity, and reflect the values upon which our country was built," including an earned legalization program for undocumented workers, a temporary-worker program with appropriate labor protections, a reduction in waiting times for family reunification, and due-process protections against prolonged and indefinite detentions.

The full text of the bishops' letter follows.

Dear Senator [Warner/Allen]:

As the bishops of Virginia's two Catholic dioceses, we write to you regarding comprehensive immigration reform, which has moral implications of considerable importance to us, to many of our nearly 700,000 parishioners, and to many individuals those parishioners serve in their churches and local communities.

As the national debate over immigration reform has intensified, we have observed its polarizing effect on elected officials, religious leaders, and so many organizations and individuals. Immigration issues certainly evoke strong passions and spark heated legal, social, and national-security debates; they are indeed very complex. All sides in the debate, however, agree on one thing: Our nation's immigration system is broken and needs to be repaired.

We come to you today because this broken system has weighty moral consequences. On a daily basis, our Church sees the products of current immigration policies -- families are separated, workers are exploited, and migrants are abused by smugglers and sometimes even die in the desert. In response to these sobering realities, you and your Senate colleagues have a significant opportunity to fashion reforms that are humane, while at the same time serving our nation's economic and national-security needs. We wish to underscore that our Church affirms the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, especially at a time when security is of particular concern. In our view, however, our nation's immigration crisis can only be addressed effectively by a comprehensive approach, rather than the enforcement-only approach taken by the House of Representatives when it passed H.R. 4437, the "Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005," in December. H.R. 4437 reaches well beyond the issue of national security – so far beyond it, in fact, that it would even punish church workers for the "crime" of feeding and sheltering people instead of screening their immigration status. Rather than criminalizing undocumented immigrants and those who provide them food and shelter, we are convinced that reform-minded legislation should establish much needed systemic changes. To that end, we believe provisions that deserve your support include an earned legalization program for undocumented workers, a temporary-worker program with appropriate labor protections, a reduction in waiting times for family reunification, and due-process protections against prolonged and indefinite detentions.

We hope you will agree that fixing a system badly in need of repair, helping workers who put food on our tables, bringing more families together, and treating detainees fairly are all worthy elements of genuine immigration reform – the type of reform that would protect our national security, respect our common humanity, and reflect the values upon which our country was built.

We are grateful for your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde
Bishop, Diocese of Arlington

Most Rev. Francis X. DiLorenzo
Bishop, Diocese of Richmond

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